

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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NOGUCHI'S IMAGINARY LANDSCAPES AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART JANUARY 24
THROUGH MARCH 4

Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes, an exhibition on view free at The Cleveland Museum of Art from January 24 through March 4, documents the stylistic evolution of Isamu Noguchi's work as a landscape architect, theater designer, planner of large-scale public projects, and sculptor. Noguchi, born in 1904, describes himself as a traditional sculptor who makes contemporary images. He has been a major artistic force of the twentieth century.

Noguchi's sculpture is a fusion of modern and historical impulses and Japanese and Western traditions. For a half century he has been a wanderer pursuing his own artistic goals while moving from object-making, to theater design, to the creation of monumental urban spaces. His work exists outside current styles and, like the man, is not easily typed. The son of a Japanese poet, Yonejiro (Yone) Noguchi, and an American writer, Leonie Gilmour, Noguchi was born in the United States and then lived in Japan from the age of two until he was 13. In America he is frequently perceived as a Japanese sculptor, and in Japan he is regarded as an American. In his own view he is first and foremost an American artist. Yet in the opening paragraph of his autobiography, published a decade ago, he wrote, "With my double nationality and double upbringing, where was my home? . . . Where my identity? Japan or America, either, both--or the world?"

This duality suggests other dichotomies in the man and his work. On the one hand are his individual sculptures, giving a sense of the privateness of viewer and object, and on the other are his environmental projects, stage sets,

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and playgrounds with their sense of community and shared experience. Yet throughout these varying works and approaches there is a discernible unity. From small carved sculptures to large environmental works certain primal forms reoccur. Some of these, cubes, cylinders, and pyramids for example, are analytic variations in solid geometry, while others, the interlocking, twisting and emerging shapes are organic in their origins. It is these analytic and organic forms that make up a visual vocabulary recognizable as Noguchi's own. Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes examines this artist's multiplicity of interests and the visual vocabulary he has used to create the art that has grown out of those interests, with special attention paid to the artist's environmental projects, stage sets, and playgrounds.

A section of the exhibition is devoted to architectural and landscape projects. Some of Noguchi's best-known gardens--at the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York, at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, and at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem--are included. Some of Noguchi's most ambitious projects were unrealized and models of these projects, including a 1930's swimming pool designed for Hollywood director Josef von Stenberg, are included in the exhibition, offering mute testimony to the extraordinary vision of the artist. Perhaps the most striking of these unrealized projects is "Sculpture to be seen from Mars." In 1947, deeply affected by the war and the use of the atomic bomb, Noguchi questioned the future of mankind. He designed a massive earth sculpture of a human face (the nose alone would be a mile high) to be constructed in a vast desert area and thus visible from Mars. If man were annihilated, the sculpture was to be an eternal reminder to the rest of the universe that the earth was once inhabited.

Noguchi is equally recognized for his furniture design, "akari" lamps, and innovative theater sets. The forms of these stage sets, most of which were created for Martha Graham, George Balanchine, and Merce Cunningham, parallel those of Noguchi's sculptures of the same period. Elements and photographs of

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these sets will be in the exhibition, and a 20-minute videotape of Graham performances using Noguchi sets will be shown in the Audio-Visual Center. The Martha Graham dance sets on view will be Herodiade (1944), Cave of the Heart (1946), Judith (1950), and Phaedra (1962). A major theater set, made in 1948 for George Balanchine's production of Orpheus, is also featured in the exhibition. Noguchi's pieces for this production include costumes as well as masks and headdresses, which are important sculptures in themselves.

Sculptures in the exhibition include works in wood, stone, marble, and bronze. They reflect a persistent tension between Western modernist attitudes and the traditional forms and materials of the Orient. Among these sculptures are several "interlocking pieces" of the mid-1940s--the distinctive style that brought Noguchi prominence as a sculptor. Several later works, consisting of rock-like elements randomly deployed in a manner evocative of a Japanese garden, reveal his interest in natural forms and show a direct relationship to his urban garden designs.

A special part of the exhibition is Variable Landscape, a group of movable wood, canvas, and bamboo sculptures created by Noguchi for the exhibition. Installed in the Museum's upper special exhibition gallery for the first week of the exhibition, Variable Landscape will serve as the site of a number of special performance events scheduled that week, most notably a work performed by the dance group Kei Takei's Moving Earth. Other activities scheduled for Variable Landscape include musical performances, dance performances, and poetry readings.

Free gallery talks in the exhibition are scheduled at 1:30 p.m. on January 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 30, and February 21 and 25. On Wednesday, January 31, at 8:30 p.m. Wolf Von Eckardt, architecture critic for The Washington Post and visiting professor at Cleveland State University, will speak on Art in the City. Von Eckardt's free lecture will include a discussion of Noguchi's work as a

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public sculptor and shaper of urban spaces. Also offered in conjunction with the exhibition is a series of free lectures on Isamu Noguchi, his career, and his interest in interaction among the arts. These will be given by Ellen Breitman and Marianne Doezema, instructors in the Museum's Department of Art History and Education, at 2:00 p.m. on four successive Wednesdays, January 31 through February 21. A 108-page catalogue of the exhibition is available for \$5.00 at the sales desk of The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes was organized at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis by its director Martin Friedman. The exhibition is assisted by grants from the General Mills Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bush Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The Cleveland showing is assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.